

New police headquarters shakes, sags

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It has been only three weeks; since Mayor Daley cut the ribbon on the new \$65 million police headquarters, and already the building is having its ups and downs.

The concrete has settled unevenly on some floors, sagging between columns. Workers had to fill in 3-inch-deep valleys in the floors, according to documents from Walsh Construction Co.

"It's like walking on a ship," one high-level cop said.

His comments are echoed by rank-and-file officers, who say desk drawers that slide open or closed are the source of jokes at the new building at 35th and Michigan. The officers did not want to be identified.

Engineers who surveyed the building in March saw partitions with inch-high gaps underneath because of uneven floors. Some of the partitions had wood blocks jammed underneath to keep them level.

"Substantial `dips' in the floor slabs are apparent in the center of each bay in the room," engineer Kurt Gustafson wrote in his report. "One can also see the `dips' in the base finish along the exterior wall at the floor."

A lawsuit says at least part of the building's foundation is sinking at an alarming rate, causing cracks in the plaster and dry wall and requiring that doors and windows be cut irregularly to fit.

Officials of the city, the Police Department and the Public Building Commission call those claims ridiculous. They say the sloping problems have been addressed and that the building is safe.

"We would not have allowed people to move into the building if it wasn't safe," said Kristen Lobbins, spokeswoman for the city's Building Department.

A walk through the basement and first, second and fifth floors found some mild sloping, but no observable cracks or sliding desk drawers.

Architects say such sagging is not unheard of in concrete buildings.

"Every contractor in every concrete building does latexing . . . filling in highs or low," said Floyd Anderson, principal of Lohan Associates, the architect on this project. "That was done here."

Police brass expressed shock that any sworn or civilian personnel would complain about a new building after being emancipated from the old relic at 11th and State, where water would trickle down the walls after toilets were flushed in the upstairs lock-up.

The new building has a workout room with exercise machines, a cafeteria that serves latte ("for the North Siders," one officer quipped), and classical music playing while callers are put on hold.

But John Xydakis, a Clarendon Hills lawyer who used to work for the construction industry, said he was on the job site before the building opened and saw enough problems that he filed suit under the state's whistleblower act against Walsh Construction Co., the politically connected firm that built it.

"I want it fixed," Xydakis said. "Someone's got to fix these things. One corner of the building is sinking like mad. It's gotten to the point people are telling jokes about it."

Pat Donley of Walsh Construction scoffed at Xydakis' allegations.

"There has been no problem whatsoever with that building moving," he said.

City officials said they expect the lawsuit to be thrown out of court.

One problem with Xydakis' suit is that it can only proceed if state money was involved in building the headquarters. None was. That is why Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan has opted not to join Xydakis' suit, records show.

Xydakis has tried to get the city or the Public Building Commission interested in joining his suit or filing their own against Walsh. But because the Police Department says it's happy, neither arm of government is likely to file suit against Walsh.

"I've heard no complaints about problems with the building," said city Corporation Counsel Mara Georges. "I believe it is ripe for dismissal."

Xydakis says the reluctance to sue Walsh may have more to do with Walsh's well-documented generosity to Mayor Daley and other elected officials in their campaigns.

One electrician said the sagging problems forced them to redo their work at more than double their original contract price. Public Building Commission spokeswoman Kelly McGrath said there was no added cost to the city because of the sagging concrete problems.

The reason the total price increased from \$44 million_Walsh's winning bid_to \$65 million was because of extras the city asked for, such as \$150,000 for five extra private bathrooms on the fifth floor for the first deputy superintendent and the four deputy superintendents, she said.

• **Caption:** Police Sgt. Jonathan Lewin (seated) and Lt. John Roberts show the computers in the new headquarters to a contingent including Mayor Daley and Supt. Terry Hillard. Mayor Daley (left) and Ald. Dorothy Tillman, in front, lead the ribbon-cutting earlier this month for the city's new police headquarters. The city insists the building is safe. Open just three weeks, the new \$65 million police headquarters at 35th and Michigan has critics who claim the building has major design flaws.**BOB BLACK; JOHN H. WHITE**

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